

Personal trainers - how to choose one

People use personal trainers to assist them reach their individual health and fitness goals. A good personal trainer will tailor an exercise program to meet your goals and personal health needs, teach you the best way to exercise and motivate you.

Good places to start looking for a personal trainer include local gyms, health centres or fitness centres. When you're at the gym, watch trainers with their clients and see how they interact. Make a note of trainers who get along with their clients and seem fully involved in their workouts. Ask friends and workmates for word of mouth recommendations or look in the telephone directory for personal trainers in your area.

Take your time before you make your final choice. Make sure your personal trainer is properly qualified before entering into any agreement. Also, while professional credentials and experience are vital, it helps to rate personality and communication high on your list of priorities as well. You may be spending a lot of time with this person.

What is a personal trainer?

A personal trainer should have relevant qualifications and be registered with a reputable fitness organisation (Kinect Australia or Fitness Australia). This person's job is to discuss your goals, assess your fitness level, design a program for you and help keep you motivated.

A good personal trainer can:

- Help you make the best use of your exercise time.
- Help motivate you.
- Help you with technique (efficiency and safety)
- Monitor your progress
- Adjust your exercise program in response to your changing fitness level
- Offer sound advice on good nutrition
- Vary your exercise options to keep you motivated, interested and enjoying your workouts.

Qualifications and experience

Many personal trainers have completed a Certificate IV (Fitness) course or they may have undertaken a degree in exercise science or human movement.

- Ask about their professional qualifications. They should have proof of their certification, including first aid.
- Ask about their experience. How long have they been working as a personal trainer?
- Ask what sort of results they've helped other clients achieve. Ask the trainer for names, phone numbers and even testimonials of other clients they have worked with and call them.
- Ask how they keep up-to-date on health and fitness research. For example, they may take refresher courses, attend industry seminars or subscribe to exercise science journals.
- If you have a specific medical problem, injury or condition (such as being pregnant, heart problems, diabetes) make sure your trainer has education in these areas and will work with your doctor.
- Ask if they (or their employer) have professional liability insurance. They should have proof of this.

What to look for in a personal trainer

Factors to discuss with the personal trainer include:

- How much does it cost to hire their services and what types of payment options are available? Do they offer a discount for larger training packages, for example, for more than one session a week?
- What about other fees, such as extra services or cancellation fees?
- Will they offer a free first session or a discounted trial period before you commit? It is important you feel comfortable training with this personal trainer.
- Are they available at the particular times and days when you're free to exercise?
- Do they recommend that you have a medical check-up before embarking on a new exercise program? This is particularly important if you haven't exercised in a long time, are overweight, are aged over 40 years or have a chronic medical condition.
- What range of physical activity options do they offer? Would you be working out in a gym, at home or outdoors?
- Ask how they tailor exercise programs for clients. How would your preferences be taken into account? What sort of services do they offer to support you in achieving your goals?
- What about updates to the exercise program that accommodate your improving fitness levels?
- Can they offer nutritional advice or refer you to appropriate sources of information on healthy eating?

Consider some more personal aspects that relate to the relationship with your trainer. Trust your instincts about the impressions the trainer makes upon you.

- The personal trainer should be someone you like. Ask yourself if you think you could get along with the trainer and whether you think the trainer is genuinely interested in helping you.
- A good listener – a good trainer will listen closely to what you say. Make sure they understand your goals. Make sure you feel comfortable asking questions.
- Attention – a good trainer will be focused only on you during your sessions.
- Tracking progress – a good trainer will regularly assess your progress and change things if necessary.

Beware of dubious operators

Some people who profess to be personal trainers aren't qualified and have very little experience. Occasionally, personal trainers are unethical even though they have the correct credentials. Generally speaking, warning signs include:

- Can't or won't provide proof of professional credentials.
- Can't or won't offer references.
- Try to force you into a contract during the first session – before you've had a chance to see if you're compatible.
- Try to sell you supplements or dieting aids, or insist that particular supplements or dieting aids must be taken as part of the program.
- Advocate useless or dangerous exercise aids or weight loss techniques such as saunas, passive exercise machines or body wraps.
- Have a 'one size fits all' exercise program that doesn't take your individual health and fitness into account.
- Insist that their method of training is the only method that works.
- At your first session, take little notice of your goals and personal health and fitness requirements and instead want you to do a workout.
- Don't turn up on time (or at all) to appointments and are difficult to contact by phone or email.
- Promise immediate and spectacular results — realistically you'd expect to see some sort of improvement in around six weeks.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Kinect Australia
- Staff at fitness centres

Things to remember

- You can find personal trainers at your local gym or fitness centre, by asking friends for word-of-mouth recommendations or by looking in telephone directories – listed under health and fitness centres.
- The recommended minimum qualification for a personal trainer is to be a Kinect Australia or Fitness Victoria registered fitness leader and hold a Certificate IV in Fitness.
- Professional credentials and experience are vital, but it helps to rate personality high on your list of priorities too, since you'll be spending a lot of time with this person.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Physical Activity Australia

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